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September 28, 2011

Senate Committee on Local Government & Elections  
State Capitol Building  
Lansing MI 48909

Re: HB 4005 and 4006

Dear Committee Members:

It is my understanding that the above referenced bills require all school board elections to be held in the November-even years. While there are many jurisdictions that would benefit from this arrangement, there are many other, rural counties which will be negatively impacted by such a requirement; and Newaygo County is one such county.

By way of information, Newaygo County is one of the largest in physical size in the Lower Peninsula and is surrounded by eight (8) other counties. We are a rural county comprised of 24 townships and four (4) cities. The county proper has five (5) school districts within its boundaries. Last year, our schools chose the November-odd election date; thereby, saving dollars by holding the elections every other year and by combining with the four city elections.

Please note the following very negative impacts these two bills would have on Newaygo County:

- ✓ First, and foremost, because school district boundaries don't stay within county and township boundaries, there will be extra costs for the school candidates to be on the ballots. These costs should NOT be required to be borne by the county or the townships. There are actually instances where it could be more costly for the schools because consolidation of precincts cannot happen when jurisdictions have small numbers of voters (like 1 voter, 4 voters, 16 voters, etc.).
- ✓ This change would require me to attempt to manage an additional 21 school districts, ISD's, and community colleges, all with boundaries outside of Newaygo County. None of these additional school districts would be filing the candidate forms with our office because none of them are within our boundaries.
- ✓ Townships comprised of multiple school districts require separate ballots, creating multiple "ballot styles". In a general election EACH ballot style will have a separate \$350-\$400 programming and layout charge. Newaygo County's would have an additional 35 ballot styles (more than doubling = 65) that would cost approximately \$13,000.00 more just because school board candidates are on the ballots.

- ✓ There will be additional costs associated with ballot orders because of the splits created by the schools as well. There are at least 15 jurisdictions with less than 100 voters that will require the ordering of extra, wasted ballots at the precinct. Additional ballot quantities due to multiple split styles by adding school board candidates and issues could double our printing costs—an additional \$30,000.00. Counties typically bear the costs of ballot printing in a general election; however, it is unfair to expect the counties to pay for extra types of ballots due to school board candidates. The option for consolidation of small numbers of voters is not allowed in general election years.
- ✓ There is real concern over the possibility of 2 ballots to accommodate all the issues on a ballot. In precincts where there would be multiple styles of 4 (for example) there could conceivably be 8 stacks of ballots at the issuing table.
- ✓ There are a number of townships with 1 voter, 4 voters, 5 voters, 60 voters, etc. in a specific school district—in these cases the voter's right to secrecy is jeopardized since there are so few voters in that precinct that vote that ballot.
- ✓ Advertising and public notices become an issue with inter-county districts as well. The question of appropriate publications with duplicate information could produce extra costs as well.

In Michigan, school district elections with boundary issues outside of counties can become very complicated. It is NOT a matter of just adding candidates to a ballot. This complexity creates concern when dealing with federal, state, county, and township candidates as well. In rural counties such as Newaygo County, county clerks perform the election duties with limited or no extra staffing—the addition of 20+ different school district candidates and proposals that are not affiliated with the county is compounded by the short time-frame that we are given between an August Primary and the November General elections.

In conclusion, school elections simply are not a “one-size-fits-all” situation. Michigan clerks and election officials strive to maintain our excellent reputation for conducting elections with integrity. Moving in the direction of House Bills 4005 and 4006 creates complications that could have serious negative effects. School districts and counties should be able to work together to choose the best “fit” for the management of the jurisdictions involved. For some, the even-year November date is a great solution—for others it is the worst. City elections have not been forced to move to an even year date and neither should the schools.

Thank you for listening to my concerns on this issue. Please contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

*Laurel J. Breuker*

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Newaygo County Clerk